

Hit The Beach!

The Southern California ASL Club Newsletter



December 2003 Volume 8 Number 4

The President's Corner

by Jim Aikens

West Coast Melee VII, the highpoint of our ASL Club calendar, is rapidly approaching. This year will mark a big step forward for the event. We have a new location and a new format. We think the new location will prove superior to Embassy Suites, with a premium facility that includes a larger game room and less expensive rooms and parking. Our new format will be another first for the ASL tournament scene, combining the best features of our old open-play format with a structured single-elimination portion in the later rounds. You can expect to see some familiar features also, including our beautiful plaques for the Melee and mini-tournament winners, and our unique full-color tournament tee shirts.

Along with our long-established programs such as the "7-0 Leaders", the "Hero Game", "ASL Bingo" and our Saturday Mini-Tournaments, we'll be featuring two new events. The first, scheduled for Saturday night, is "ASL Jeopardy", where attendees will be able to compete for a cash prize in an ASL trivia game similar to the popular game show. The second program is one that I've been cooking up for some time now. Over the years I've heard many members say how they'd like to play a Campaign Game, but just don't have the time or space to do it. Well, on Saturday morning, you'll have your chance. We're going to play Red Barricades CG IV "Bled White" (with a balance modification). We'll have teams of 2-3 players for each side, and use a time limit during turns so we'll be able to finish.

On Thursday, we will have open gaming all day (not just after 3:00 pm as in previous years), with access to a small ballroom that will be a considerable improvement over the 'hospitality suites' of previous years. We will also have the "Command Bun-

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Marching Orders

by Matt Cicero

2003 winds down to a close and I sit here just a half hour before the ball drops finishing off this issue of *HTB!* We've had a terrific year here in Southern California. With well-attended events and a lot of games played, I think we managed to cram in the right amount of fun.

This issue sees a number of updates and AARs. We have a little note about our last One-Day event this fall at Jim Aiken's office. We also toss out a thank you to the organizers of the two Playtest Days. Roberto Feinstein has an update on the horrific infighting between the SoCal Regulars and the evil Team Italy. That VASL competition is really heating up! Finally, we have an update on our SoCal Rock. It's been moving these past few months!

Our *Roll Call!* victim this month is Sean Geraghty. Sean is clinging desperately to his "newbie" jacket but time is against him and we just may have to graduate him as a "grognard" in 2004 if he keeps winning and designing cool scenarios.

We have two features this month. First, Jim Aikens has pulled together a simple tactical primer on the use of fortifications. I know I learned a trick or two reading through it. Jim also provided our second feature, a brief discussion about the recent trends in our hobby and its outlook for the future...kinda appropriate for a New Year edition, eh?

We round out this issue with our usual Book Review and *SWEET! - OUCH!* features.

Looking to the future, 2004 seems like it will be a terrific year. Here's wishing you all hope, happiness, health and good gaming.

Editor@socalasl.com



The Fall "Big Men" One Day Event AAR

by Jim Aikens

Congratulations to Matt Cicero, who won our 10-3 Leaders Tournament!

We had a total of 10 members present for our One-Day, though only 8 chose to participate in the actual tournament. The 10-3 theme and the two-round format seemed to work well. We had two lists of scenarios featuring either a 10-3 Leader or a 10-2 Japanese Leader. One list was used in each round. The first round was single elimination. The second round was also single elimination but with a twist. The winner of the event was the player that not only won his game in the second round, but also scored the highest according to a secret list of objectives devised for each scenario by the T.D.

One interesting outcome of the Tournament was that 5 out of the 6 games played saw the death of the 10-3/10-2 Leader! And not one died from a sniper hit! In fact, most seemed to succumb rather easily to their wounds. Only Bryan Earll's battered and bruised Japanese 10-2 lived to tell the tale on the sands of Tarawa.

In addition to the Tournament, there were a number of playtest games played and a great deal of camaraderie. We had a great pizza party over at Fillippi's for dinner to top off the evening. My thanks to Matt C. and Bryan E. for buying and bringing the soda and beer and a special thanks also to Ed Kemp, who did a lot of the cleaning up while Paul Simonsen and I battled it out in 'Vulcan's Forge'. I want to thank everyone who came and played. For those who missed it; Sheldon debuted his giant IIFT, which wraps around *three walls* of my game room. Mr. Magoo could read it from ten feet away!

Our next event, barring a few informal playtest days, is The Big Event itself; West Coast Melee VII, February 5th thru 8th.



Playtests To The Right of Me...

Our fall playtest events were a big success. In the end, we decided to organize two events...one in the North at Bryan Earll's House and one in the South hosted by Eric Johnson. (Scott Thompson was ready and willing...and in the end was able to save a few Wife-Points by joining us in the North). A huge thank you to you guys for putting up with the unwashed hordes for a day! A second round of applause goes out to the die-hards who got the word out and organized these two events.

Seems we managed to accomplish our two goals for the Playtest Days. First, we got some great playtesting accomplished. Nearly all the scenarios in the hopper saw some action and that has been a terrific boost as we near year end and the holidays begin to consume available playtest time. Second, we had some nice BBQ action at each event...and that means a happy crowd.

Looks like we may have found yet another way to gather and have fun in SoCal!

WEST COAST MELEE VII

The Big Event is upon us!! February 5th through 8th, we'll be gathering for Southern California's annual ASL weekend. We are sporting a great new format and a terrific new location. Pre-Registration Packs are available for download on the SoCal ASL website and yes we will be taking pre-orders using credit cards through PayPal again this year. A reminder...the West Coast Melee T-Shirts will only be available via pre-order so please consider placing your order for one now even if you are not sure if you can make it to the Big Event itself. Also, we are again offering One-Day Passes for those folks who just can't get away for an entire weekend.

This year we will be gathering at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Irvine where we will have almost twice the room space for ASL with room rates at 2/3 the price! You can jump to their website from ours to make reservations as part of our group, "West Coast Melee".

This year's program will include the all-new Melee, Mini-Tournaments, the Thursday Recon Event, the Hero Game, our all-new Team Campaign Game Event, 7-0 Leaders, ASL Jeopardy, ASL Bingo and even a special appearance by Don Petros who says he has something incredible for us to play with (on?) all weekend. So get your plans for February ready and we'll see you there!!

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SoCal ASL vs. Team Italy

VASL World Domination Tournament: Winter Update

SoCal ASL On Top...

...But Italian VASL Threat Gaining Fast !

Southern California – The international VASL community continues to be fixated on the now legendary contest pitting SoCal ASLers against their Italian counterparts. The competition has been furious, with quarter neither asked for nor received. Now in their 8th month of combat, both teams have put forth admirable efforts in their attempt to control the destiny of the VASL world.

The SoCal ASL team has claimed victory in four of the eleven games, while Team Italia has earned two victories against seasoned SoCal veterans. First to fall was Team Italy's captain, Nicolò "Neuro Niky" Blotto, who went down fighting to SoCal's own Ron "Acerbic Curmudgeon and Lowly Priest in the High Holy Church of ASL" Mosher in a bitterly fought but thoroughly enjoyable game of J42 Grebbe End. Next, Team Italy exacted their revenge when Andrea "Andrea Fantozzi" Fantozzi made mincemeat of SoCal's own veteran rules lawyer Fred "Fred Timm" Timm. Both games saw heated competition on the board tempered with camaraderie and friendship off the board – a success by any measure! Score: SoCal 1, Italy 1.

Soon after, SoCal's favorite San Diegan, Eric "Mad Dog" Johnson fed it to Italy's Mario "Gheba" Nadalini in J37 Tretten in Flames. As friendship overtook competition, these two arranged for another game while their card-board carnage was still warm. At last report, Mario was teaching Eric a thing or two about revenge. Stay tuned to

this one folks - it's going to make history as Mario elevates to Grand Poobah of the Italian VASL elite with what may well become a contest of best two out of three. Meanwhile, SoCal's Matt "Desert for Dessert" Romey bested Italy's Fabio "Moto Foto" Mazzuchelli (international motorcyclist extraordinaire) in A38 North Bank. Score: SoCal 3, Italy 1.

As this issue was heading to press, breaking news of two more victories flashed around the globe. First, Italy's Nicola "Il Mago" Marangon taught SoCal's Dave "Sou Cal" Myers a thing or two in a hotly contested playing of ASL55 Retribution. At the same time, SoCal's Sean "The Pope" Geraghty pulled one out of his miter in a stunning upset over Italy's Marco "MarcoM" Merli in A37 Dreil Team. Fun was had by all, and Sean appears noticeably taller since earning his hard won victory over Marco. Score: SoCal 4, Italy 2.

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, it is indeed still anyone's guess as to who will walk away with bragging rights as the best VASL team on planet Earth. Stay tuned as the rest of your SoCal patriots defend your bragging rights as they struggle against all odds against their Italian counterparts. This titanic struggle shall be long remembered as the turning point in international VASL relations. Will the U.S.A. be taken to task for their unilateral VASL "diplomacy" or will Team Italy go down like a cheap whore? Regardless, one thing is for certain – one team will be the winner, and the other will merely be left living in paradise.

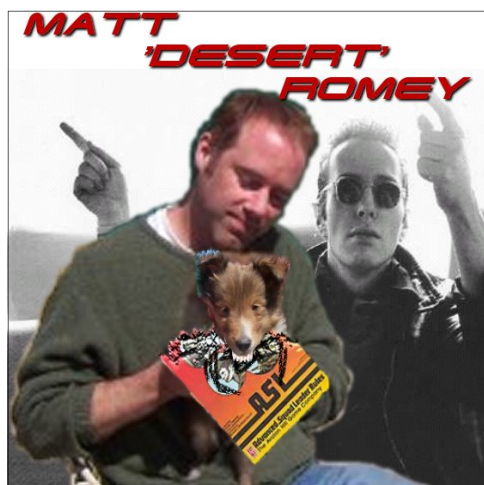
More to follow!

-Robert Feinstein

International VASL Competition Games

SoCal ASL Player	Italian Player	Scenario	SoCal side	Italy side	Turn/Result
Robert Feinstein	Luca Martini	Terminus Sened (TAC71)	Americans	Italians/Germans	Turn 3
Scott Thompson	Peter Rogneholt*	Pride and Joy (90)	Greeks	Italians	Turn 4
Matt Romey	Fabio Mazzuchelli	North Bank	German	British	SoCalASL WIN
Fred Timm	Andrea Fantozzi	Retribution (ASL55)	Americans	Italians	Team Italy WIN
Eric Johnson	Mario Nadalini	Tretten in Flames (J37)	Germans	British	SoCalASL WIN
Chas Argent	Sergio Puzziello	Beachhead at Ozereyka Bay (A26)	Russian	Axis	Turn 3
Ron Mosher	Nicolò Blotto	Grebbe End (J42) + Dutch balance	German	Dutch	SoCalASL WIN
Dave Myers	Nicola Marangon	Retribution (ASL55)	Americans	Italians	Team Italy WIN
David Nicholas	Stefano Marian	Ambush! (28)	Axis	Allied	Turn 3
Sean Geraghty	Marco	Dreil Team (A37)	German	British	SoCalASL WIN
Stance Nixon	Bruno Bono	Confusion Reigns (ASL12)	Americans	German	Turn 4

**SoCal ASL vs. Team Italy VASL World Domination Tournament
Featured Match-Ups Gallery**



Roll Call! ...Sean Geraghty!

HTB!: Where are you from? Any military experience?

SG: I was born in Los Angeles, UCLA to be exact. They must have given me some experimental drugs at birth because I ended up going there for college too. Although I did not serve, I am very proud that members of my family did. My Dad (though an immigrant from Ireland) served in the 6th Army, at Fort Lewis, Washington. My Grandfather was in the 25th infantry and fought at Guadalcanal. My Grandmother was in the WAVES and was stationed at Pittsburg, California. Because of this, I have joined the Sons of the American Legion to honor them. I recommend that children of veterans that served during wartime do the same.

HTB!: What got you started with ASL? When?

SG: I had a subscription to The General back in the early-to-mid eighties. I saw advertisements for this incredible game called Advanced Squad Leader, but I was overwhelmed. The complexity rating was Very High, and I knew it was beyond my comprehension at the time. I have played many games over the years, and I would go to the Game Zone in Pasadena to get my fix. The owner Dave Lauffe raved about ASL and said it was the one game that he would want on a desert island. That sealed the deal for me, and I started scouring eBay for as many items as possible.

HTB!: How did you learn the game?

SG: It took me a year of reading the rule book and pushing counters around on my own before I contacted the SoCalASL Club. Brandon Liesemeyer called me up and invited me to his place to play my first game. I have never looked back.

HTB!: Why do you like ASL over other leisure activities?

SG: The thing that I like the most is that ASL can depict just about any land based battle from World War II. I enjoy the fact that no two games play the same way twice. It opens up an almost infinite number of strategies and outcomes. Lastly, while I wish it was a bit easier to digest so that I could convince others to play, I love the complexity of the game.

HTB!: How do you like to play ASL? FtF, Tournaments, VASL...

SG: I play any way I can, but I mostly play VASL by e-mail. I have enjoyed taking part in the VASL challenges against the Colorado and Italian players.

HTB!: Do you like to play Fast? Slow? Medium?

SG: I wish I could play fast, but I still have to look up many rules. I like playing at tournaments because players like Fred Timm, Robert Feinstein and Matt Cicero answer my questions quickly.

HTB!: How often do you get to play?

SG: I try to always have a VASL game going by e-mail. I really enjoyed this past summer, because I was able to play every week. Paul Simonson and I played Matt Cicero and Bryan Earll at Paul's house. We played a Critical Hit dog called "Saito's Farewell Order". The scenario sucked, but great fun was had by all. I play-test as much as possible when I do play. I think it is

very important to the club, and I am starting to design scenarios of my own ("Just a Bit Outside" is my first attempt).

HTB!: Let's talk about some of your favorites in ASL...

Favorite vehicle?

SG: I'll take anything with a flamethrower. If I had to pick, I'd go with the Crocodile.

Favorite nationality?

SG: Since I'm Irish, I usually don't like the British. But in ASL, I love them. They usually have pretty good stats, and you gotta love the fact that they don't cower (at least the 1st line and elite units don't).

Favorite troop type?

SG: If we're playing DYO, and I get to choose, I'll take the German SS troopers. Did the newbie just mark out for the easy answer? So what? I'll take a 6-5-8 with a broken morale of 9, smoke exponent of 2 and Assault Fire capability (in 44-45) over just about anything else offered. I might get out-maneuvered, out-shot or out-played, but I'll have the coolest looking counters on the board!

Favorite theater of war?

SG: PTO. It's what my Grandfather fought in, so it holds special meaning for me. I dig the way the Japanese play, but I still don't have them mastered. I also love Dense Jungle, because I can see the Lines Of Sight more easily!

Favorite tactical situation? Why?

SG: I like all infantry scenarios. I have not learned how to play effectively with armor, so I like to try and level the playing field.

Favorite scenarios? Ok, list your Dogs, too...

SG: I like anything played on the historical maps. My favorite Red Barricades scenario was "Turned Away", but "Vulcan's Forge" (the new one from Matt and Bryan) is going to be my new fave. My other favorites are any scenarios that I win. "Whoa Mohammed!" makes that list since it was the first scenario I ever won; I beat Matt Romey who swears it is a dog. I did not like playing "Shklov's Labors Lost" (against Eric Morton at my first WCM) since I lost my 10-3 on the first turn (a common occurrence for me). The above mentioned "Saito's Farewell Order" will keep me away from Critical Hit products for a while. *(I hafta agree with Sean...Saito had fleas... -ed.)*

Favorite product produced to date? Why?

SG: I have not purchased it yet, but I'm looking forward to Operation Watchtower. The thought of a whole box of Guadalcanal scenarios is very appealing to me. I would have to say that my favorite product is one that I have not purchased. VASL is the only reason that I still play ASL on a regular basis. Rodney Kinney is THE MAN for making that happen.

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Wire and Trenches and Mines, Oh My! A Beginner's Guide to Fortifications

by Jim Aikens

Way back in the early days of ASL (Protozoan Era, if I recall correctly), when I was first learning the system, one of the things I had a hard time grasping was the tactical possibilities of fortifications. Intuitively, I knew that Trenches, Wire, AP Mines, Pillboxes and Foxholes were powerful tools if used correctly but I just couldn't get them to work together in my defenses. Then I met and played (now retired) Marine Captain Brooke Schurman. Brooke had a talent for applying his infantry school training to his ASL games, usually with great effect. And he never hesitated to pass that knowledge (including the proper use of fortifications) on to the other members of the San Diego ASL Club when he was with us.

This article is meant primarily as a guide about fortifications for new players. It is not meant to be a vernacular treatment of the fortification rules, nor a replacement for them. It is not comprehensive, either, since I am limiting my discussion to Trenches, Wire, AP Mines, Pillboxes and Foxholes.

You might want to refresh your memory by rereading Sections 26 through 30 of Chapter B in the ASLRB2 before you dig in on the rest of this article. —ed

Fortifications

The primary thing to remember about fortifications is that they work best when they work together. Think of them as a defensive version of combined arms. Below I've given an overview of five types of fortifications, with suggestions on how to employ them together to enhance their strengths and diminish their weaknesses.

Trenches (B27.5):

Trenches are my personal all-time favorite fortification. They offer the most in terms of defensive flexibility and give the defender some nifty advantages. Perhaps most important are the advantages while moving. You can move directly from one trench hex to an adjacent one without exiting (unlike foxholes) for 1 MF regardless of the COT of the hex itself (including ignoring walls, hedges, mines and wire). If you use non-assault movement in trenches, you won't even lose concealment. Additionally, trenches can be connected to pillboxes and in some cases, cellars. They provide a -1 DRM to rally attempts, cannot be entered by wheeled and HT vehicles and are bog terrain for tracked vehicles. Then of course there are the more obvious advantages that they share with foxholes: +2 TEM against most attacks and +4 TEM against Overruns and OBA attacks.

Trenches should ALWAYS be set up in clusters or strings with other trenches. A single trench counter is hardly more than a 3 squad foxhole. A group of them allows you to take advantage of all of their special movement features. Trenches give the defender the great advantage of being able to quickly redeploy his forces with minimal risk and no loss of concealment. When setting up trenches, try to have them connect in such a way that your units can move along



your trench system to an out-of-LOS location (for example: behind a wall hexside (no LOS to non-adjacent attackers), into an interior woods hex, down a slope or into a gully). The only problem with trenches is that in most scenarios you just never have enough of them. In a case when you only have a few, keep them together and create one solid strongpoint as opposed to scattering them individually around the board like deployable wood buildings or big foxholes.

Wire (B26):

Wire is another of my favorite ASL fortifications. The important thing to remember about wire, to quote Brooke Schurman, is: "Wire by itself is an annoyance that can be crossed or bypassed by the attacker relatively quickly. Wire covered by fire from your automatic (think high ROF) weapons is a formidable obstacle." Like trenches, wire should be deployed in clusters or strings in one critical spot along your defensive position. A single wire hex can simply be bypassed. You want to 'tie' your wire to a natural obstacle (like a marsh, swamp, water or bamboo hex) or the board edge. But as Brooke alluded to, simply having your wire in your enemy's way isn't enough. You have to place your high ROF weapons so they can cover those wire hexes as he's crossing them. Mortars, often very common in a defender's OB, are perfect for this type of work. Better still, if you can spare it, a MMG or HMG with a -1 leader. Yum. 70mm or 80mm OBA can also be very effective but is not my first choice as it can inadvertently clear the wire for your opponent.



AP Mines (B28):

AP minefields come in 3 sizes; small (6FP), medium (8FP) and large (12FP). Usually the defender has some flexibility as to the size and number available. The first question...what size is appropriate? There are two schools of thought here. Some guys like to have a few medium or large minefields, arguing that their opponent is only going to stumble into them once (and avoid them thereafter) so they want to get the maximum effect. Since you have to take a minefield attack when you enter AND leave the hex, a 12FP minefield can do some serious damage. Other guys (myself included) almost always spread the mines as thin as possible, to cover the most hexes. The logic being that a 12FP mine hex that your opponent never enters is a wasted asset. I'd rather have 2 chances of him walking into a 6FP attack than one at 12FP. One other factor that may influence the size of your minefields is the enemy's morale. If the attacker has 6 morale troops, a 6FP minefield will be very effective. If he's attacking with 8 morale troops, you might think about going with 8FPs.



The second important question...where to put them? Unlike trenches and wire, mines can be effective in individual hexes, as long as they're the *right* hexes. If you look at the attacker's probable avenues of approach, look for critical locations where he's likely to pause to build a firebase, like a clus-

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ter of woods hexes, or a building. Those are *perfect* spots for mines. He'll almost certainly avoid those hexes once he's stumbled into the mines (even 6FP ones) and that will inhibit his ability to set up powerful firebases where he can do the most to hurt you. If you want to mine a string of tree hexes but are short of mines, mine the middle hex to discourage a multi-hex firegroup. Remember also that you can mine building hexes, but the mines are only effective when units are moving into or out of the building...they have no effect if you move from building hex to connected building hex within the building.

A second option for deploying mines is to put them directly in front of a VC hex. In this case, you want to use larger minefields to guarantee an effect and cover those minefields with fire to assure that the attacker breaks. You're likely going to want to deploy minefields in clusters or strings in this case also, so the attacker can't simply move around them. Covering minefields with fire is important in some cases, less so in others. If casualty VPs are important in the scenario or you're in a CG where killing the enemy is important, then cover them with fire to maximize the 'double break/casualty reduction' opportunities. Otherwise, think of them as tools to channel or hinder your opponent's attack.

Pillboxes (B30):

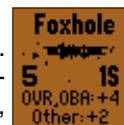
Pillboxes are one of my *least* favorite fortifications because of their lack of flexibility. Ok, I know, you'll point to their high CA TEM and immunity to small arms fire outside their CA. Also, they automatically connect to an adjacent trench. And with that high TEM, it's sort of like getting to choose the location of a stone building within your set-up. They are concealment terrain, provide a -1 DRM for rally attempts and a broken unit in a PB is *never* required to rout. And a unit cannot enter a PB that contains enemy infantry. (B30.44) That means that the enemy cannot enter your PB even if all you have in it is a broken, wounded 6+1 leader. *But*, they have some serious shortcomings as well. First, they can be easily smoked. Second, concealed units in a PB are treated as unconcealed for IFT and To-Hit purposes (B30.7). Third, their restricted CA makes them very vulnerable to being flanked. While some might argue that this is offset by their immunity outside their covered arc to small arms fire, I think it makes them vulnerable. Hell, the attacker being outside the PB's covered arc makes *them* immune to fire as well, at least from the PB. Of course, if you have tunnels to connect to your PBs (Japanese have these automatically), you have much more flexibility. To mitigate these disadvantages, you need to have other units nearby that can cover the approaches to the PB with fire. And if you don't have tunnels, always try to connect you PBs to your trenches (assuming you have some). A lone PB, without a tunnel or trench to connect to it, is pretty much a "stand and die" position. That's not something you want to put a valuable asset into. When putting a PB into my defense, I try to have a unit in a trench in the next hex, to cover the PB's blind approaches with fire, and force the attacker to smoke *two* hexes. Plus the unit in the trench can advance in if the PB defenders break. I also try to set up my PBs so



their covered arc runs along the board edge. If not, they should be set up closer to the center of the playing area, with a LOS to one board edge. Either set-up limits the attacker's flank maneuver. Oh, one other nasty little weakness with PBs...they are very susceptible to AP fire (B30.35). So if the attacker has tanks, be sure to keep an AT asset handy to cover the PB as well.

Foxholes (B27.1):

The last fortification I'll mention here is foxholes. These are perhaps the weakest of all fortifications. They have some obvious advantages, primarily the +2 TEM against IFT attacks and the +4 TEM against OVR and OBA attacks. Their TEM is cumulative with airbursts, so they can be handy defending a woodline against OBA or mortar fire. On the downside, however, they have no flexibility whatever. If you need to leave the thing you're going to get shot at climbing out (unless advancing or routing). For this reason, try to put foxholes in non-open ground to mitigate the FFMO if you have to leave in the movement phase. Good deployment for a foxhole is as a stand-and-die position; say occupied by a HS with a PSK or BAZ in an unpaved road as a speed-bump for the attacker's tanks, or in a VC hex or important exit hex. Another good deployment is behind a wall or hedge in a reverse slope situation (remember, entrenched units cannot be seen behind walls except by adjacent attackers). This allows your units to "prairie dog"; pop up and down behind the wall, and thus in and out of LOS. Very handy if you're skulking from enemy defensive fire. Much as I might malign the lowly foxhole as the lamest of all fortifications, it is in one way superior to all others: it is the only fortification that can be created during play. A foxhole dug in the right spot, at the right time, has won many a game. For this reason alone, the foxhole should be considered a worthy companion to the other fortifications mentioned here.



In summary, the important thing to remember with fortifications is to think of them as combined arms. Employ them in mutually supportive positions and try to avoid the "stand and die" nature of individual, unsupported fortifications. Be sure to cover your wire and the blind approaches to your pillboxes with fire. Better to have your fortifications clustered in one strong, mutually supportive place on the board than scattered thinly and isolated over a wide area. As a final note, try to keep your trenches, pillboxes, and foxholes as far back as your setup allows, while deploying your mines and wire in more forward positions, but within LOS. Your trenches and pillboxes should always constitute your main, if not your last, line of defense.

One final note about fortifications. They tend to pop up in a number of other rules sections. A10. Morale, for instance. They also sometimes suffer moderate rules adjustments in some of the campaign modules such as RB and Tarawa...so read carefully! -ed.



THE ROCK REPORT

by Matt Cicero



The Rock: Pick a player in your gaming group and declare that he has the Rock. The first person to beat that person in an ASL game wins the Rock. The only restriction on Rock transfers is that you cannot immediately win the Rock back from the guy who just won it from you.

When last we discussed the SoCal Rock, Sean "the Pope" Geraghty had been tagged as our Starter. Since then, our Rock has been on the move... -ed.

Game 1 (Sean Geraghty vs. Scott Thompson): I beat Scott Thompson in ASL68 The Rock. I was the Americans, and beat Scott on a technicality since we later realized that Japanese leaders don't Pin. We played FTF over the course of three weeks and 4 different evenings. -Sean

Game 2 (Sean Geraghty vs. David Myers): Sean and I completed our recent battle for the Rock with an all email playing of PB4 Killeans Red. My stoic British lads overcame the embittered Atlantic wall defenders and the Rock was seized to the community of Diamond Bar. I offer the challenge to all to take it from the citadel and bring to your village. -David

The Challenge: Chuck and I will be playing J56 A Burnt Out Case with the Germans receiving the balance of an additional MMG and Trench. Play will be a mix of email and live VASL 4.0 around 9:00 over the next couple of weeks. When we're going to play perhaps we can blast a mailing out and on line members can drop by to view Chuck blasting my advancing Russians moving toward Vilnius on the road to Warsaw. -David

Game 3 (David Myers vs. Chuck Hammond): I beat Dave Myers the other day on a technicality (he forgot you could not enter a PB from a separate hex like you can a foxhole and only thus lost to yours truly) so without beating my chest for so ignoble a victory, I extend a heartfelt invitation to anyone entertaining ideas of stealing my Rock to "Bring 'em on!" -Love, Commander Codpiece (Chuck)

The Call To Arms: YIKES! Is this Rock jinxed? Two wins on two technicalities! Someone must take up Codpiece's glove and thump him in true heartfelt fashion to prove the Rock's integrity once and for all!! ...or do you all FEAR the Codpiece?!? -Unknown

The Impassioned Next Challenge: Chuck, I'll take you on. -Fred

The Evil Plot Unfolds: You're on, Captain Bunnypants! [Cmr. Codpiece waddles back to his cave, hoping to find a scenario to shark Fred in, hopefully when Fred is nice and drunk first. He turns around, and shouts "How about Pride and Joy, Captain? The ROAR says it's even - I'll take the Italians!"] -Chuck

The Prey Is Nearly Snared: You want the Italians in Pride and Joy? You're on! -Fred

The Crowd Goes Wild! Fred, You gotta be sh*tin' me. Don't do it! -Matt R.

Too Late! The Trap is Sprung...The Pun Unleashed: You're just kidding, right? I wouldn't do that to you, Fred. There's no *pride* and no *joy* in winning as the Italians! (Cackling evil laughter fades to a wheezing silence...) -Chuck

Game 4 (Chuck Hammond vs. Fred Timm): Last night I beat Chuck Hammond in a game of "A Worthy Adversary" (A playtest scenario he designed.) I am now accepting challenges. -Fred

Fred, having extracted his pound of flesh from Chuck with surgeon-like efficiency now stands high atop the SoCal Rock. Who will be man enough to knock him from his perch? Fred has thrown down the gauntlet...

"Two weeks ago I announced that I had beat Chuck for the Rock and said that I was open for challenges. To date I have heard nothing. I realize that many of you are busy with the holidays and other things (as am I), but I should be available for a game one day next weekend (Friday to Sunday). Right now I can make it any day. Unless of course you are all afraid to play me." -Fred

Book Review: A Frozen Hell

by Matt Cicero



ISBN: 1-56512-249-6

William R. Trotter's labor of love required 24 years to finish. A Frozen Hell was well worth the wait. It is obvious from the outset that Trotter is intimately familiar with his material. His writing is filled with a combination of historical fact and weighed explanation. The novel is not meant to be bombastic or glitzy, destined for a Hollywood screenplay nor is it a dust-dry recitation of facts with little or no personal consequence. Trotter has presented us with a very well prepared history of the Winter War, carefully crafted into an enjoyable and enlightening read.

A Frozen Hell is logically organized, starting with the numerous machinations leading to up to the conflict. The impact of the growing power of Germany, the selfish efforts of Allied nations, the historical situation between the combatants and the intransigence of the political leaders. It is an interesting path that led to the Winter War and Trotter leads us effortlessly down its many twists and turns.

Trotter then provides a biographical study of the most influential man involved in the conflict, "the Baron", Gustav Mannerheim. Though brief, the reader is able to glean many of the influences and characteristics that helped mold the man who would be so instrumental in holding back the immense Red Army.

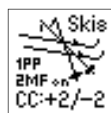
Trotter provides a useful Order of Battle for the purposes of crafting his novel, though the level of detail rarely flows below the division level. Primarily, this chapter allows the reader to grasp the relative strengths of the forces that will fight in each section of the conflict. Further, it divulges the expectations of the opposing forces at the outset of the war. Finally, it provides insight into the general preparedness and doctrines of each side.

The main portion of the book is dedicated to the battles along each area of conflict. Trotter breaks down the war into sections and describes the fighting in each section in turn for the first half of the war. The Karelian Isthmus, defended by the Mannerheim Line is the main area of conflict. However, the actions just north of Lake Ladoga, along the barren Russo-Finnish frontier to the north and near the arctic circle in the far north are also well documented. Because of the severe limitations on movement imposed by the Scandinavian winter, each area of conflict almost becomes a war unto itself. Only near the Karelian Peninsula and Lake Ladoga does the impact of one front have immediate consequences for its neighbors. Still, Finland is not a vast country and a breakthrough along any front would eventually lead to defeat.

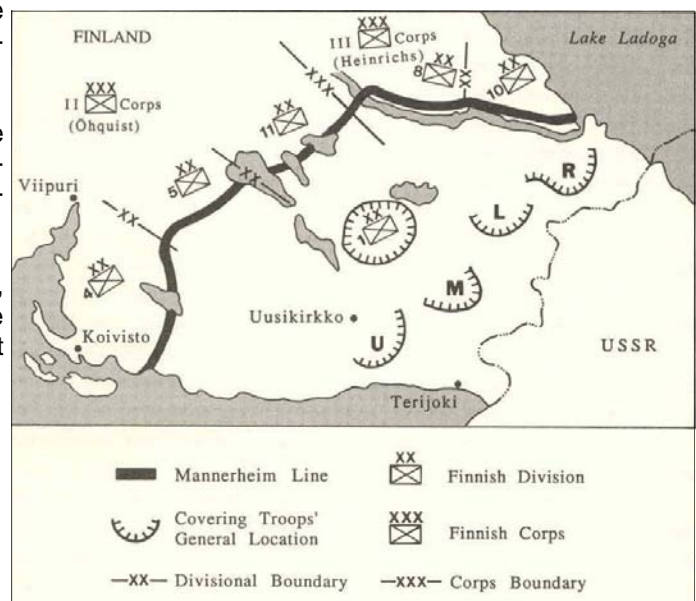
Trotter moves the action along all fronts until it reaches a natural breaking point. We learn of the "Sausage War" and of the textbook battle of "Suomussalmi". We learn about "mottis" and "sisu". We meet Semyon Konstantinovich Timoshenko. We also acquire a good working knowledge of the arms, equipment and tactics employed during the many battles.

Trotter closes his book with several chapters concerning the political efforts that led to the end of the conflict...and the unfortunate consequences of Finland's later alliance with Germany during WWII.

All in all, this is an excellent book highlighted with clear maps, numerous photos and a good list of references. If you have never studied the Winter War, I would suggest that you start with this book.



Scott Thompson has once again provided some quality reading material for this issue's book review. I wonder if he'll notice that the books he lends me never seem to find their way home...-ed.



LEGIONS OF WWII: The U.S 25th Infantry Division *by Matt Cicero*

Division Name

United States 25th Infantry Division

Division Nickname

"Tropic Lightning".

Sometimes called the Pineapple Division.

Division Insignia

Description: On a red taro leaf with stem up, surrounded by a yellow border, a yellow lightning flash per pale.

Symbolism: The taro leaf is indicative of the origin of the 25th Infantry Division in the Hawaiian Islands, while the lightning flash is representative of the manner in which the division performs its assignments.

Nationality/ Date Created

American / On February 28, 1921 under the command of Brigadier General Joseph E. Kuhn, the Hawaiian Division was formed.

WWII Deployments

7 Dec 1941: Hawaiian Department; 2 Jan 1943: XIV Corp; 17 Dec 1944: Sixth Army.

Commanding Officers

Maj. Gen. Maxwell Murray (October 1941-May 1942), Maj. Gen. J. Lawton Collins (May 1942-January 1944), Maj. Gen. Charles L. Mullins, Jr. (January 1944-15 May 1948), Maj. Gen. William B. Bean (25 August 1948-).

Major Engagements

Activated: 10 October 1941 in Hawaii. *Campaigns:* Guadalcanal, Luzon.

WWII Distinctions/Medals

Distinguished Unit Citations: 6. *Awards:* MH-6 ; DSC-72 ; DSM-3 ; SS-622; LM-100; DFC-1 ; SM-40 ; BSM-1,394 ; AM-147.

A Brief History

On October 21, 1941, the Hawaiian Division was inactivated. The major portion of the old unit became the 24th and 25th Infantry Divisions. Nine weeks later Japanese planes launched the infamous attack on Pearl Harbor and the 25th entered World War II. When the old Hawaiian Division's assets were split to fill the 24th and 25th Infantry Divisions, these new divisions were organized under the triangular concept. To convert one square division into two triangular organizations required two extra infantry regi-

ments, and the 298th and 299th, both from the Hawaiian National Guard, were selected. These units had a high number of enlisted personnel, and some officers of Japanese descent. Distrust of their national loyalties caused the War Department to order the 298th to be replaced in the 25th Division by the 161st Infantry of the Washington National Guard. The soldiers of Japanese heritage in the 298th and 299th were withdrawn from their regiments and formed into a provisional infantry battalion, which later became the 100th Infantry Battalion, a highly decorated unit that served in the European Theater. After the Japanese machine-gunned Schofield Barracks, 7 December 1941, the 25th Infantry Division moved to beach positions for the defense of Honolulu and Ewa Plains.

A year after Hawaii was attacked; Major General J. Lawton Collins, led the Division to the Solomon Islands to reinforce other Army units and relieve the Marines. Following intensive training, the 25th began moving to Guadalcanal, 25 November 1942, to relieve Marines near Henderson Field. First elements landed near the Tenaru River, 17 December 1942, and entered combat, 10 January 1943, participating in the seizure of Kokumbona and the reduction of the Mount Austen Pocket in some of the bitterest fighting of the Pacific campaign. The threat of large enemy attacks caused a temporary withdrawal, but Division elements under XIV Corps control relieved the 147th Infantry and took over the advance on Cape Esperance. The junction of these elements with Americal Division forces near the cape, 5 February 1943, ended organized enemy resistance. The 25th Infantry Division proved to be the element that tipped the scales in favor of the U.S. side. The speed with which the Division executed this mission earned it the nickname of "Tropic Lightning."

A period of garrison duty followed, ending 21 July, 1943. On that date, advance elements debarked on Munda, New Georgia. The 35th Infantry, under the Northern Landing Force, took part in the capture of Vella Lavella, 15 August to 15 September 1943. Meanwhile, other elements landed on New Georgia, took Zieta, marched through jungle mud for 19 days, and captured Bairoko Harbor by 14 August, winning the island. Elements cleared Arundel Island, 24 September 1943, and Kolombangara Island with its important Vila Airport, 6 October. Organized resistance on New Georgia ended, 25 August, and the Division moved to New Zealand for rest and training, last elements arriving on 5 December.

The 25th was transferred to New Caledonia, 3 February-

(Continued on page 11)



14 March 1944, for continued training in preparation for the invasion of the Philippines. The Division landed in the San Fabian area of Luzon, 11 January 1945, to enter the struggle for the liberation of the Philippines. It drove across the Luzon Central Plain, meeting the enemy at Binalonan, 17 January. Moving through the rice paddies, the 25th occupied Umingan, Lupao, and San Jose and destroyed a great part of the Japanese armor on Luzon. On 21 February, the Division began operations in the Caraballo Mountains. It fought its way along Highway No. 5, taking Digidig, Putlan, and Kapintalan against fierce enemy counterattacks and took Balete Pass, 13 May, and opened the gateway to the Cagayan Valley, 27 May, with the capture of Santa Fe. By the time the 25th finally captured the Pass, it suffered more combat deaths than any other U.S. division at Luzon. Until 30 June, when the Division was relieved, it carried out mopping-up activities. With the Battle of Luzon at a close, Tropic Lightning was moved to Camp Patrick to prepare for the invasion of Japan. On 1 July, the Division moved to Tarlac for training, leaving for Japan, 20 September.

The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki precluded the plan to invade Japan. Instead the 25th took part in the Occupation of Japan after the surrender. It had become characteristic of the men of the 25th to go beyond what was expected of them. In peace, as in war, Tropic Lightning put its heart into its work. During the 57 month tour in Japan, the Division was charged with the responsibility of processing the war's refugees and homeless. The 27th Infantry Wolfhounds and the 8th Artillery, Automatic Eighth founded an orphanage at Osaka for the war's forgotten children. The men have supported the orphanage since then, building it into one of the finest in the Orient.

Medal of Honor Recipients of Tropic Lightning

COOLEY, RAYMOND H.

Rank and organization: Staff Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company B, 27th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division.

Place and date: Near Lumboy, Luzon, Philippine Islands, 24 February 1945.

Entered service at: Richard City, Tenn.

Born: 7 May 1914, Dunlap, Tenn.

G.O. No.: 77, 10 September 1945.

Citation:

"He was a platoon guide in an assault on a camouflaged entrenchment defended by machineguns, rifles, and mortars. When his men were pinned down by 2 enemy machineguns, he voluntarily advanced under heavy fire to within 20 yards of 1 of the guns and attacked it with a hand grenade. The enemy, however, threw the grenade back at him before it could explode. Arming a second grenade, he held it for several seconds of the safe period and then hurled it into the enemy position, where it exploded

instantaneously, destroying the gun and crew. He then moved toward the remaining gun, throwing grenades into enemy foxholes as he advanced. Inspired by his actions, 1 squad of his platoon joined him. After he had armed another grenade and was preparing to throw it into the second machinegun position, 6 enemy soldiers rushed at him. Knowing he could not dispose of the armed grenade without injuring his comrades, because of the intermingling in close combat of the men of his platoon and the enemy in the melee which ensued, he deliberately covered the grenade with his body and was severely wounded as it exploded. By his heroic actions, S/Sgt. Cooley not only silenced a machinegun and so inspired his fellow soldiers that they pressed the attack and destroyed the remaining enemy emplacements, but also, in complete disregard of his own safety, accepted certain injury and possible loss of life to avoid wounding his comrades."

DAVIS, CHARLES W.

Rank and organization: Major, U.S. Army, 25th Infantry Division.

Place and date: Guadalcanal Island, 12 January 1943.

Entered service at: Montgomery, Ala.

Birth: Gordo, Ala.

G.O. No.: 40, 17 July 1943.

Citation:

"For distinguishing himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty in action with the enemy on Guadalcanal Island. On 12 January 1943, Maj. Davis (then Capt.), executive officer of an infantry battalion, volunteered to carry instructions to the leading companies of his battalion which had been caught in crossfire from Japanese machineguns. With complete disregard for his own safety, he made his way to the trapped units, delivered the instructions, supervised their execution, and remained overnight in this exposed position. On the following day, Maj. Davis again volunteered to lead an assault on the Japanese position which was holding up the advance. When his rifle jammed at its first shot, he drew his pistol and, waving his men on, led the assault over the top of the hill. Electrified by this action, another body of soldiers followed and seized the hill. The capture of this position broke Japanese resistance and the battalion was then able to proceed and secure the corps objective. The courage and leadership displayed by Maj. Davis inspired the entire battalion and unquestionably led to the success of its attack."

*FOURNIER, WILLIAM G.

Rank and organization: Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company M, 35th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division.

Place and date: Mount Austen, Guadalcanal, Solomon

(Continued on page 12)

Islands, 10 January 1943.

Entered service at: Winterport, Maine.

Birth: Norwich, Conn.

G.O. No.: 28, 5 June 1943.

Citation:

"For gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty. As leader of a machinegun section charged with the protection of other battalion units, his group was attacked by a superior number of Japanese, his gunner killed, his assistant gunner wounded, and an adjoining guncrew put out of action. Ordered to withdraw from this hazardous position, Sgt. Fournier refused to retire but rushed forward to the idle gun and, with the aid of another soldier who joined him, held up the machinegun by the tripod to increase its field action. They opened fire and inflicted heavy casualties upon the enemy. While so engaged both these gallant soldiers were killed, but their sturdy defensive was a decisive factor in the following success of the attacking battalion."

*HALL, LEWIS

Rank and organization: Technician Fifth Grade, U.S. Army, Company M, 35th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division.

Place and date: Mount Austen, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, 10 January 1943.

Entered service at: Obetz, Rural Station 7, Columbus, Ohio.

Born: 1895, Bloom, Ohio.

G.O. No.: 28, 5 June 1943.

Citation:

"For gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty. As leader of a machinegun squad charged with the protection of other battalion units, his group was attacked by a superior number of Japanese, his gunner killed, his assistant gunner wounded, and an adjoining guncrew put out of action. Ordered to withdraw from his hazardous position, he refused to retire but rushed forward to the idle gun and with the aid of another soldier who joined him and held up the machinegun by the tripod to increase its field of action he opened fire and inflicted heavy casualties upon the enemy. While so engaged both these gallant soldiers were killed, but their sturdy defense was a decisive factor in the following success of the attacking battalion."

McGAHA, CHARLES L.

Rank and organization: Master Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company G, 35th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division.

Place and date: Near Lupao, Luzon, Philippine Islands, 7 February 1945.

Entered service at: Crosby, Tenn.

Birth: Crosby, Tenn.

G.O. No.: 30, 2 April 1946.

Citation:

"He displayed conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity. His platoon and 1 other from Company G were pinned down in a roadside ditch by heavy fire from 5 Japanese tanks supported by 10 machineguns and a platoon of riflemen. When 1 of his men fell wounded 40 yards away, he unhesitatingly crossed the road under a hail of bullets and moved the man 75 yards to safety. Although he had suffered a deep arm wound, he returned to his post. Finding the platoon leader seriously wounded, he assumed command and rallied his men. Once more he braved the enemy fire to go to the aid of a litter party removing another wounded soldier. A shell exploded in their midst, wounding him in the shoulder and killing 2 of the party. He picked up the remaining man, carried him to cover, and then moved out in front deliberately to draw the enemy fire while the American forces, thus protected, withdrew to safety. When the last man had gained the new position, he rejoined his command and there collapsed from loss of blood and exhaustion. M/Sgt. McGaha set an example of courage and leadership in keeping with the highest traditions of the service."

*PARRISH, LAVERNE

Rank and organization: Technician 4th Grade, U.S. Army, Medical Detachment, 161st Infantry, 25th Infantry Division.

Place and date: Binalonan, Luzon, Philippine Islands, 18-24 January 1945.

Entered service at: Ronan, Mont.

Birth: Knox City, Mo.

G.O. No.: 55, 13 July 1945.

Citation:

"He was medical aid man with Company C during the fighting in Binalonan, Luzon, Philippine Islands. On the 18th, he observed 2 wounded men under enemy fire and immediately went to their rescue. After moving 1 to cover, he crossed 25 yards of open ground to administer aid to the second. In the early hours of the 24th, his company, crossing an open field near San Manuel, encountered intense enemy fire and was ordered to withdraw to the cover of a ditch. While treating the casualties, Technician Parrish observed 2 wounded still in the field. Without hesitation he left the ditch, crawled forward under enemy fire, and in 2 successive trips brought both men to safety. He next administered aid to 12 casualties in the same field, crossing and re-crossing the open area raked by hostile fire. Making successive trips, he then brought 3 wounded in to cover. After treating nearly all of the 37 casualties suffered

(Continued on page 16)

ker", a separate lounge area where players can get a soda or beer, make a sandwich, and kabitz about their games.

While we've been hard at work on West Coast Melee, other interesting and exciting things have been happening in SoCal. I'm pleased to report that sales of Melee Pack I have been excellent over the year and the pack has been very well received in our hobby. I brought 30 copies to ASLOK and sold them out in less than 3 hours. I could have sold 30 more. Our playtest team is hard at work on Melee Pack II. We have formed a "scenario selection committee" to help rank and rate submissions and keep the process as fair and objective as possible. We're making a final push to get MP II finished as soon as possible...we still have scenarios that need final playtests. If you can find the time over the holiday season to squeeze in a playtest game, please let Matt Romey know.

One last comment about West Coast Melee. Our new location has one small catch, in order to secure the discounted room rate, we had to make a partial room guarantee. We set the room block conservatively enough so that this would not impose an undue risk for the Club financially. The hotel will honor our room rate in excess of our block, subject to availability. What does that mean to the guys who are attending? **MAKE YOUR RESERVATION EARLY, THE EARLIER THE BETTER!** While the room rate cut-off is January 22nd, I anticipate our room block will be gone well before then, and you'll be gambling that they still have rooms available if you wait too long. I would hate to hear that members missed the event because we ran out of hotel rooms. It was a tough call on our part choosing a number to block; too small and we risk limiting attendance, too large and we incur risks to the Club financially. This problem was compounded by the lack of a track record at this facility. In the end, we felt it was in the best interest of the Club to err on the side of caution. So please help us (and yourself) by getting that room reservation in ASAP. If you encounter difficulty with the hotel reservation process, please let me know immediately. I hope you all have a great holiday season. See you in February!

President@socalasl.com

HTBI: What do you think about DYO? Ever tried it?

SG: I have never used it to play a scenario against another opponent. I have used it to play some Solitaire Scenarios. I think it is a great tool for designing scenarios, and I referred to it when I designed mine.

HTBI: CG versus one-shot games...any preference?

SG: I have never played a campaign game, but they do sound like fun and I want to try one some time. The one-shot games would be my preference though. I've played a couple large games, and it is hard to recover from a bad set-up. I wouldn't want to blow the set-up on a CG.

HTBI: Best ASL experience...

SG: My best experience was playing "The Last Bid" at Bryan Earl's house. Bryan and I were the hapless Russians to Brandon and Cicero's dominating Germans. I HOB'd the 10-2 on my first roll of the game; he went Berserk and took the squad manning the HMG with him. It was my first HOB ever, and I thought that I had done good by rolling snakes! Even still, that was my best ASL experience because I really learned how to play.

HTBI: Worst ASL experience...

SG: Does missing the most recent tourney count? If not, I would have to say my worst experiences in the game are when I do something different than what I planned on doing. I don't know if it's ADD, or just that I get excited when I play. I don't mind losing, but I hate when I allow my opponent to beat me.

HTBI: What Would You Like To Try Next?

SG: I really need to learn the armor rules better. Then I want

to tackle Desert Rules. And then I want to play, design and learn more, More, MORE!

HTBI: How could the game be better?

SG: I know somebody has created a program to play ASL against a computer (JASL). I am waiting for this to be complete and bug free. Winning the lottery would make the game better for me, because I would have more free time to play.

HTBI: Top 3 things You'd Recommend For Playing ASL?

SG:

1. Play as much as possible. When playing, try to play people better than you (that's an easy one for me).
2. Don't be afraid to try something new. I have heard that many people don't like PTO or DTO. After learning PTO in the past year, I have opened the door to so many fun scenarios, and in some ways, PTO is easier to play than ETO.
3. Design a scenario. You will learn many things about the game, and you will always have play-testers like me ready to play against you.

HTBI: Any Final Comments?

SG: I was surprised that I was chosen as the first recipient of The Rock. I am very thankful, though, since I can claim that I had possession of it at least once. My name will forever be linked to the best players in our club.

Thanks Sean!



Is Our Hobby Dying? *by Jim Aikens*

Every once in a while, either at an ASL gathering or on the ASLML, I hear someone voice the opinion that ASL, as a hobby, is dying. Well I decided to dig in on this theory and see if we are all truly headed the way of the Dodo.

For a number of years now, I've tracked tournament attendance, not just for WCM, but most of the other significant ASL events in the United States. The attendance numbers that I will quote are ones either posted on the ASLML by the T.D. or his spokesman, or by information provided to me directly by the T.D. The numbers represent the previous 3 years, a long enough period in time to produce a fairly accurate picture of recent attendance trends in our hobby. I will say up front, the numbers I'm going to give you are not pretty.

ASLOK:

This is the largest and oldest significant ASL tournament in the world. In the late 1990's attendance ran in the 180 range, according to Mark Nixon. Then came the tragedy of 9/11. The ASLOK event that followed 2 months later drew 147, the lowest turnout in some time. In 2002 attendance bounced up to 154. This year, it dropped back down to 136.

Winter Offensive:

Although an event with a fairly recent history, it has proved quite popular, and has consistently been the world's 2nd largest tournament since its inception. Perhaps that is due to its timing in the year, location, the fact that it's MMP's official tournament...or a combination of the three. In 2001 it drew 125. In 2002 attendance dropped slightly to 120. This year, it dropped again to 100.

ASL Open:

The country's third largest tournament drew 80 attendees in April 2001, 59 in 2002 and 51 this year.

West Coast Melee:

After averaging approximately 50 attendees in 1999 and 2000, WCM drew 65 in February, 2001. But last year we had only 51. In 2003 we drew 47.

Noreaster:

This tournament is very much like WCM in that it's basically a large regional tournament that has been in existence about the same number of years as WCM. In March 2001 they drew 47 players. In 2002 they dropped to 44 players. This year, however, they bounced back to 51.

Winter Wars:

This tournament is held the same week as WCM and enjoys a fairly central location. In 2001 they drew 31, in 2002 they drew 35. This year, they jumped up to 40.

DonCon:

This is the old Avaloncon tournament that has suffered greatly from its once lofty attendance numbers of 100 or more. In 2001 they drew 32 players. In 2002 they increased to 35 players, but in 2003 they dropped to 24.

Enfilade:

This tournament in the Pacific Northwest drew 38 players in 2001 and 32 in 2002. It jumped back up to 38 in 2003.

Bitter-ender:

This is the Raleigh tournament. In 2001 they drew 30 players. In 2002 they jumped up to 35, but this year dropped back to 27.

There are plenty of other tournaments, both inside and outside the U.S., but I've tried to focus on the largest ones that have at least a 3 year history and have provided reliable attendance numbers. During that period, Wild West Fest had to cancel one year, and March Madness died a slow death. Of the 9 tournaments I've profiled, only Winter Wars has enjoyed a steady increase in attendance, while Noreaster is above its 2001 attendance number and Enfilade has held steady. The other six have seen a steady drop in attendance, typically between 10% and 20% off their recent highs. Like I said, the numbers aren't pretty, especially among the larger events.

Is this evidence that our hobby is dying? I don't think so. Oh? Then why the drop in attendance?

Well, I think economics has had a big impact on attendance. If you're not working, or have recently taken a pay-cut, it's pretty hard to justify to the family that you're going to spend \$150 - \$200 for a hotel room and food so you can have a fun little weekend with the boys. Now add to that the cost of flying for out-of-towners. In other words, attending a tournament that isn't within commuting distance ain't cheap. ...and that makes it pretty easy to say "next year" when tournament time rolls around.

Another impact might be the drop in post 9/11 air travel. Mark Nixon believes that 9/11 has not particularly impacted fly-in attendance at ASLOK. My own observation at ASLOK confirms this. At times it seemed that the Europeans out-numbered the Americans. On the other hand, WCM saw fly-in attendance drop by half after 9/11, and half again last year. I do not have fly-in numbers for other tournaments, so a conclusion is difficult to make. I think we could safely say though, that post 9/11 air travel certainly hasn't *helped* attendance at some tournaments.

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One last possible impact on attendance? One word: VASL. That's right, VASL. Think for a moment. If you lived in an area with a relatively low population density and a correspondingly low number of potential ASL opponents, how would you get your ASL fix? In the years before VASL, those players would drive or hop on a plane and travel to a large tournament, where they could play to their heart's content, at least for a few days. But now, no matter where you live in the world, you can play. And you can do it for free, at your convenience, without interrupting your family life or taking time off from your job to travel. You can fit your gaming into the nooks and crannies of your time. Over the last several years, successive versions of VASL have greatly improved the on-line ASL experience. Perhaps even more important, VASL has become increasingly easy to set up, install and operate with support readily available. The steady drop in tournament attendance corresponds to a direct, inversely proportionate rise in the popularity of VASL. It's also my opinion that the decrease in FtF play over the past 3 years has been more than offset by a proportional increase in VASL games. I think that contrary to the opinions expressed by some, there are more ASL games being played now than at any time in its history.

More games being played? I thought we were dying...

More games. My evidence is anecdotal, but in my mind very significant. In the 10 years I have been traveling around the country to play at tournaments (Avaloncon and ASLOK) not to mention WCM, I have been struck by the increase in the typical level of play. I'm not the only one to notice either, many tournament attendees have commented on this phenomenon. The level of play seems to improve every year. If the ASL hobby was dying, opponents would be becoming increasingly scarce, and quality of play would go down, not up.

Yes Jim, but what if the number of players is shrinking and the remaining few simply play more?

At first glance it might appear that we are losing ASLers each year. But if you look a bit more closely, you will see something interesting happening. It seems that at any given time, somewhere between 10% and 20% of the ASL player population is changing their level of interest in the hobby due to life issues. Getting married, or divorced, changing jobs, relocating, having kids and starting/graduating from school are all events in real life that affect the amount of time and money a player has for his hobby. Guys start, stop, increase or diminish the amount of time that they play depending on these, and so many other reasons. So, for example, three of your favorite opponents suddenly stop showing up to play...and it looks like your small group of ASLers just got smaller. But wait!

Those same life influences come full circle and you notice that two old ASL friends thought lost these past few years now return to the fold...and lo, they bring along a newbie! Sure, the guys you are used to playing are gone for a while...and it seems you've lost your regular opponents. But the truth is there was no change in the number of players around! I think the number of active ASL players has remained pretty stable with maybe a slight increase over the last 3 years. Certainly SoCal ASL has seen a net increase due to new players entering the scene and old players rejoining after a slight hiatus.

Of course, some readers might be saying, "poor Jim, he's rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic", and that might be so. After all, noone is really certain why tournament attendance is dropping or why the average quality of play is increasing or how many games of ASL are being played (VASL and FtF) or even how many actual active players there are in the world at a given moment. And yet, if the economy continues to improve, air travel picks up again and tournaments continue to offer tons of ASL entertainment, I think we will see attendance at tournaments improve and more of our "missing in action" ASLers find time to play again. Maybe it's been a little rough as of late, but I think we'll all have plenty of opponents to play ASL with for a long time to come.

Sorry Dodo...



Words That Echo...

"Comrades, our attack was unsuccessful; the division commander has just given me the order personally - in seven minutes, we attack again..."

Russian Commander, whose battalion had already suffered 60% casualties assaulting the Finns' Mannerheim Line that day. Karelian Isthmus, December, 1939.

by his company, he was mortally wounded by mortar fire, and shortly after was killed. The indomitable spirit, intrepidity, and gallantry of Technician Parrish saved many lives at the cost of his own."

ASL Scenarios Featuring the 25th Infantry Division

HG! 2 "The Gifu": The 2nd Battalion of the Cactus Regiment, in concert with a few Marine tanks, begins the reduction of The Gifu on Guadalcanal. Armor, it was hoped, would be able to penetrate the lines and reduce the pillboxes that had held off infantry assault for nearly a month. Colonel Oka, though surrounded and with dwindling supplies, decides to fight it out and make the Americans pay dearly.

Sorry, folks, but HG! 2 was the only scenario I could find that included an element of the mighty Tropic Lightning. If you know of any others, drop me a line!



SWEET!...OUCH!

...sometimes heroes are born in ASL without ever rolling snakes...

Sgt. Ayabe began his career as an unassuming 9-0 Japanese leader in a game of A83 "Last of Their Strength".

Turn 1: Ayabe, concealed, advances in and ambushes an American 667 and kills them to a man in HtH combat.

Turn 2: Ayabe's dominating presence helps eliminate a second 667 which found itself without a rout path.

Turn 3: The rain becomes intense! Ayabe becomes wet...and irritated.

Turn 4: Ayabe, venting his irritation and trying to warm up, runs across fairly open ground trying to seal off yet another 667 from any viable rout path. A 20-2 shot...8-2 shot...12-1 shot...6-2 shot...have no effect at all...and a third 667 is destroyed.

Turn 5: Ayabe suffers the bullets of a 30 flat shot...survives...then is Overrun by a maddened 667 that is determined to see this lone officer put to death. In a horrific display of skill, Ayabe whirls his katana through the entire squad, killing them all...only to slip in the mud and impale himself on the upturned bayonet of one of his fallen foes...he had rolled a 3 and so had the 667.

Ayabe, finally dead, had taken 4 squads of Americans along with him. Now that is one heroic 9-0 if you ask me...



Upcoming Events...

02/05/04: West Coast Melee VII
03/30/04: Hit The Beach! V9N1
05/05/03: Cinco de Gringo One-Day

The Southern California ASL Club

President	Jim Aikens President@socalasl.com
VP/Newsletter Editor	Matthew Cicero Editor@socalasl.com
Web Director	Paul Simonsen Webmaster@socalasl.com
Playtest/Challenge Coordinator	Matt Romey ChallengeCup@socalasl.com
Los Angeles Regional Director	David Rosner LosAngeles@socalasl.com
Orange/Inland Regional Director	Scott Thompson OrangeInland@socalasl.com
San Diego Regional Director	Robert Feinstein SanDiego@socalasl.com

Contributors

Jim Aikens, Matt Cicero, Robert Feinstein, Sean Geraghty

Credits

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